



From Landfill to Loom: Two Teacher-Researchers Chronicle Their Sustainability Narratives via The Secret Under My Skin

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Abstract:

Traditionally, the responsibility for sustainability education has been assigned to the fields of science, engineering, technology and outdoor education. More recently, English language arts have begun to play an integral role in educating students on the importance of preserving the environment for future generations. Pertinent research, however, indicates that many teachers, including those teaching English, do not feel fully prepared to address sustainability in their classrooms. Such teachers would benefit from either pre-service or in-service support where they would have opportunities to gain more knowledge about sustainability, while also critically inquiring into their related pedagogical beliefs and practices. Before beginning the process of planning and implementing relevant sustainability education experiences for English teachers, it is imperative that we, two teacher educators, first examine our own teaching narratives related to this important topic. Focusing on the dystopian young adult novel, *The Secret Under My Skin* (McNaughton, 2000), we make generous use of Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory of reader response to critically inquire into past experiences that shape our recurrent views and actions in the classroom. We express our back-and-forth transactions in interspersing sections of poetry, prose and image, including emerging questions to consider as starting points for future engagement with teachers on the integration of sustainability education into the English language arts curriculum at the secondary school level.

Keywords: sustainability education; language arts; Louise Rosenblatt; reader response theory; narrative inquiry

Du site d'enfouissement au métier à tisser : Deux enseignantes-chercheuses racontent leurs récits de durabilité via *Le secret sous ma peau* (*The Secret Under My Skin*)

Résumé :

Traditionnellement, la responsabilité de l'éducation au développement durable est attribuée aux domaines de la science, de l'ingénierie, de la technologie et de l'éducation en plein air. Plus récemment, les arts de la langue anglaise ont commencé à jouer un rôle essentiel dans l'éducation des élèves sur l'importance de préserver notre environnement pour les générations futures. Des recherches pertinentes indiquent cependant que de nombreux enseignant(e)s, y compris ceux qui enseignent l'anglais, ne se sentent pas pleinement préparés à aborder la durabilité dans leurs classes. Ces enseignant(e)s bénéficieraient d'un soutien préalable ou en cours d'emploi où ils/elles auraient la possibilité d'acquérir plus de connaissances sur la durabilité, tout en enquêtant de manière critique sur leurs croyances et pratiques pédagogiques. Avant de commencer le processus de planification et de mise en œuvre d'expériences d'éducation à la durabilité pertinentes pour les enseignant(e)s d'anglais, il est impératif que nous, deux formatrices d'enseignant(e)s, examinions d'abord nos propres récits pédagogiques liés à ce sujet important. En nous concentrant sur le roman dystopique pour les jeunes adultes, *The Secret Under My Skin* (McNaughton, 2000), nous utilisons généreusement la théorie transactionnelle de Rosenblatt sur la réponse des lecteurs pour enquêter de manière critique sur les expériences passées qui façonnent nos vues et nos actions récurrentes en classe. Nous exprimons nos allers-retours aux sections entrecoupées de poésie, de prose et d'image, y compris des questions émergentes à considérer comme points de départ pour un engagement futur avec les enseignant(e)s sur l'intégration de l'éducation au développement durable au programme des arts de l'anglais au niveau secondaire.

Mots clés : l'éducation à la durabilité; les arts du langage; Louise Rosenblatt; la théorie de la réponse du lecteur; l'enquête narrative

According to Walker (2010), "When we create things we draw on the materials of the Earth. In the process, we unavoidably alter and, in some way, diminish the natural world" (p. 3). Traditionally, the responsibility for sustainability education has been assigned to the fields of science, engineering technologies and outdoor education. Recently however, English language arts have started playing an integral role in educating students on the importance of preserving the environment for future generations. Despite this, relevant research suggests that many teachers, those teaching English and otherwise, feel improperly prepared to teach and discuss sustainability in the classroom (Medrick, 2013). Thus, many teachers can benefit from both pre-service and in-service support where they increase their knowledge and skills that concern sustainability education and simultaneously inquire into their own beliefs about sustainability.

Before beginning the process of planning and implementing relevant learning experiences on sustainability for teachers, we feel that it is imperative that we, two teacher educators, first examine our own teaching narratives related to this important topic. As teachers we recognize that bringing our selves to the classroom is unavoidable; we are not excluded from the practice of self-inquiry. Focusing on the dystopian young adult novel, *The Secret Under My Skin* (McNaughton, 2000), we make generous use of Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory of reader response to critically inquire into past experiences that shape our recurrent views and actions in the classroom. We give special attention to the interdependent relationship between humans and our natural world as we transact with the settings, characters and plots of our chosen work. Finally, we present our back and forth transactions in interspersing sections of poetry, prose and image, including emerging questions to consider as starting points for future engagement with teachers on the integration of sustainability education into the English language arts curriculum at the secondary school level.

Background: Sustainability and English Language Arts

From among the various existing definitions for the term "sustainability education" (Sammalisto, Sundstrom, Haartman, Holm, & Yao, 2016; Scheuerman, Gritter, Schuster, & Fisher, 2010; Schroth & Helfer, 2017), we selected the definition set out by Medrick (2013), who states, "Sustainability education is intended to provide learning, training, and practical experience, in both formal and non-formal settings, that fosters personal development, community involvement, and action for change in our human and natural worlds" (p. 3). His definition captures our belief in the holistic nature of sustainability education as an interdisciplinary pedagogical practice for both the classroom and community, where individuals come together to critically and actively respond to the care of the natural and human world. An integral component/element that Medrick includes in his definition is the notion of personal development, which we address via narrative inquiry in our paper.

Despite its appropriation by various segments of the mainstream mass media to advance political agendas (Moore, 2011), the term sustainability continues to represent a solid and ever-growing field of interdisciplinary research and practice for protecting the natural systems that support life on Earth (Sammalisto et al., 2016) and maintaining lifelong learning for all (Adams, 2016).

For example, Klosterman, Sadler and Brown (2012) report on the integration of media studies and sustainability issues in a secondary school science course.

Askela, Wu and Halonen (2016) investigated the feasibility of a massive open online course to promote adolescents' learning regarding sustainable energy. Keane and Keane (2016) reported on a number of projects in which elementary school students turned to both technology and the arts to produce prototypes of physical places and spaces such as playgrounds, classrooms and cities. Lastly, in relation to sustainable education, music and technical crafts, Ruoknen, Sepp, Moilanen, Autio and Ruismaki (2014) studied students' design construction and subsequent performance of five-string kanteles, all examples of Finnish national heritage.

Orr (2002) emphasizes the capacity of the human mind's potential for wonder and appreciation in relation to sustainability and human intention. It is not surprising that sustainability education has been emerging as an interdisciplinary venture where, according to Clark and Button (2011), "all participants gain a deeper and broader understanding about human environment, relationships, and how humans impact natural resources" (p. 41). In a recent resource document, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2017) claims that all teachers, no matter the subject area or grade level, should be prepared to incorporate environmental education into their daily teaching agendas. Furthermore, pertinent research literature emphasizes the pedagogical potential for sustainability education that English language arts teachers bring to such an interdisciplinary process (McClanahan, 2013). In fact, McClanahan (2013) claims, "As English language arts teachers, . . . it is well within our capacity to cross over into territory once claimed exclusively by the sciences" (p. 4).

Concentrating on maintaining the well-being of the planet, Bruce (2011) advocates that secondary school English teachers move to a more environmentally directed approach to teaching that includes such activities as reading adventure stories, exploring the immediate ecosystem via place portfolios and studying the destructive forces of war on the environment. To help inform students about "the ancient precursors to sustainability of natural resources" (p. 52), Scheuerman, Gritter, Schuster and Fisher (2010) developed a pedagogical collection of activities on the use of Native American legends in the secondary school English classrooms. Lundahl (2011), a science and language arts instructor, incorporated activities as follows: using metaphors to express inner and outer landscapes, analyzing setting as a living entity and assigning nature observation journals, all of which she felt motivated students to become critical, creative and engaged citizens. To connect students to their local communities, Esposito (2012) provided writing assignments that helped "students identify those places and communities that are personally significant, and engaged them in meaningful work that deals with real issues and real audiences" (p. 71). Mazor (2011) arranged a field trip to a Shakespeare Garden for her students so they could better understand that "drama and poetry don't simply exist inside our minds; they are part of the world around us, and it is incumbent upon us to preserve and protect these stories" (p. 73). After guiding students in a study of language conventions associated with sustainability, Miller and Nilsen (2011) concluded that focusing on sustainability provides a natural way to study language, which has the potential to inspire students to "see how we now live in a mutually dependent world, and, perhaps, most importantly, . . . connect what we do in school to what's happening in the world" (p. 61).

Although there are certainly English language arts teachers who have been effectively integrating sustainability education into their teaching agendas, relevant literature reveals that many do not feel confident to do so (Bondar et al., 2007; Dymont & Hill, 2015; Uitto & Saloranta, 2017). No matter where they are along the continuum of effectively integrating sustainability into their English language arts lessons, so many teachers would benefit from the process of inquiring into their own sustainability narratives. In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) asserts that the English classroom offers numerous possibilities for developing a deeper understanding of one's self, others and the world. Moreover, Rosenblatt (1995) states that the activities of the English classroom create an environment to encourage individuals "to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his [or her] own life more comprehensible" (p. 7). In our paper, we focus on our reading of a novel to act as a role model to help facilitate English language arts teachers' inquiry into their recurring narratives in relation to sustainability education. Engaging in their own teaching narratives of sustainability will foster their awareness of sustainability as part of the language arts curriculum.

Methodology

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reader Response

Rosenblatt (1995) published *Literature as Exploration* in which she refers to readers' responses to text as "happenings", or "lived-through experiences", in which special meanings evoked by related words and images determine what the work will communicate to them (Church, 1997). A central element that emerges throughout Rosenblatt's theory of reader response is the concept of transacting with a text along a continuum of the aesthetic—that which is personally activated—as well as the efferent—the information that is carried away. Rather, than employing the term "interaction" to describe a reader's engagement with a text, Rosenblatt preferred to use the term "transaction" to denote the interdependent relationship that a work and its reader have on each other throughout the reading process. That is, the author may write the book, but it is the shifting of recurrent life experiences that the reader brings to the reading which articulates the meaning.

To critically inquire into the meaning behind past experiences influencing our recurrent teaching narratives, the *Secret Under My Skin* (McNaughton, 2000) will provide the working material. In this science fiction novel, a "technocaust" takes place in the 24th century in a model social welfare project. Here, the protagonist, Blay Raytee, who lost her family and identity in the technocaust, has the job of mining an old landfill for reusable materials. Eventually, a powerful bio-indicator hires Blay as her live-in assistant, leading Blay to discover the history of her own early life, including her identity. We initially read this book to consider its suitability for use in a Bachelor of Education methods course on teaching English at the intermediate division. Soon after, we decided to use it as the centrepiece of our own narrative inquiry in relation to sustainability education. It was during this second reading that we each selected our own passages that evoked connections to our pedagogical beliefs and practices, always considering implications for integrating sustainability education into the secondary school English curriculum.

As we inquired into our own past experiences, we gave special attention to the interdependent relationship between humans and our natural world as we responded both aesthetically and efferently (Rosenblatt, 1986) to the settings, characters and plots of our chosen work, which we present here in back-and-forth multimodal transactions (Rosenblatt, 1986; Siegel, 2012), in interspersing sections of poetry, prose and image. In particular, we drew on “the full impact of the sensuous, emotional, as well as intellectual forces . . . linking the human and natural world” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 106). An integral element of our transactions will be the emerging questions we ask as starting points for future engagement with teachers on the integration of sustainability education into the English language arts curriculum for secondary school learners. As Shodell (1995) emphasized, “Active questioning should be a part of everything you do” (p. 278). In some ways it is fair to say that we are taking the space of a book as printed on the page and turning it into the place of our own reading, invested with our own understanding of the world (Mackey, 2010).

Multimodal Narrative Inquiry

Comprised of the selections teachers make from their store of life experiences, narratives influence the beliefs and actions by which they teach. Whether it is deciding to assign a new novel to a grade ten class or contemplating on the possibility of collaborating with a colleague to implement an interdisciplinary lesson, narratives assume a central role (Davis & Murphy, 2016; Saleh, Menon & Clandinin, 2014; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). We return to our past to reconsider our current sustainability education practices via the reading of *The Secret Under My Skin*. We use narrative inquiry as a method of recollecting and thinking about experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Agreeing with Leggo (2008) that narratives can be told in many different genres, from cartoon to clothing, from illustration to journal, from waxworks to yarn, we processed and articulated our narratives multimodally using such means as photography, poetry, prose, felting and sculpting. Multimodalities, an amalgam of available modes of meaning making, such as collage, film and portraiture (Kaimal et al., 2016; Martikainen, 2017; Cyr, 2009), have already shown great potential for facilitating teacher narrative inquiry (Albers, Holbrook & Harste, 2010; Scott Shields, 2016; Tremblay-Dion, 2017).

For example, when Tremblay-Dion (2017) carried out a study of her own early connections to textiles to advocate for the study of them in the school curriculum, she documented her journey with photographs. Specifically, she incorporated images of personally meaningful textile creations, as well as pictures of herself building and using a handloom, to represent the warp and weft of her narrative stories. To chronicle her journey of becoming an arts-based researcher, Scott Shields engaged in visual journaling—the use of both visuals and written texts to document her research notes (2016). Specifically, she drew parallels between her experiences associated with learning to swim and her experiences as an emerging researcher using arts-based methodology. In one journal entry, she compared her visual and written explorations to the rhythmic motions of the tides. In another entry, Sara Scott Shields viewed her involvement in visual journaling like a swimmer caught in an undercurrent when she was a child. In still another entry, she portrayed her reflective, analytical thoughts as ripples echoing outward in the water. In all her journal entries, drawings done in what

appears to be black pen rinsed with watercolor paint accompanied her written explanations. Albers, Holbrook and Harste (2010) came together to reflect on why the arts, and particularly the creation of their own artwork, provide an additional lens to view and enact literacy practices. Albers' sculptures of clay animals, represented in her text by a work entitled *Rhinoceros Rhyton*, examined the places and spaces that animals occupy in relation to "rhytons", ancient drinking vessels. In Holbrook's case, she used photography and collage to depict a girl in a field of data to represent the concept of surveillance via standardized testing. To summarize their experiences with artistic engagement, Harste penned a cartoon placing the three authors on *Echo Point*, apparently contemplating echoes of artistic influences situated on a parade of rocks positioned in front of them.

The Secret Under My Skin by Janet McNaughton (2000) provided the working material for our narratives of sustainability. As we inquired both aesthetically and efferently into our own past experiences, we gave special attention to the interdependent relationship between humans and our natural world. We transacted with our individually selected settings, characters and plots of this chosen work, presented in a back-and-forth exchange expressed in interspersing sections of poetry, prose and image.¹ An integral element of our transactions were the emerging questions we asked as starting points for future engagement with teachers on the integration of sustainability education into the English language arts curriculum for secondary school learners. In the section that follows, we invite readers to transact with us as we each live through and narrate personally selected passages from the book as happenings or events (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Our Reader Transactions

Cynthia

Tilling the Land

It is 2368, and the young wards of the work camp, more fondly known as the Model Social Welfare Project, make their way to the landfill to find anything of use. Plastic. Styrofoam. Bottle caps. Blay, the main character, wonders how the lives of those from the past could "be filled with so much that they could throw all this away?" (McNaughton, p. 9). According to Louise Rosenblatt, the text and the reader combine to create transactions (Sanders, 2012). In the rereading of a novel, prior life encounters lay the groundwork for meanings assigned to a story, to our stories. Long before sustainability became a commodity of the state, my life moved among fields, swampy tributaries and neighborhood streets. In winter, I built icehouses in the side yard, next to the clothesline rail. In summer, I dug a fort into the earth and camouflaged it with tall grasses and dried leaves. The environment moved in and out of seasons, woods and tides that churned into hurricanes and flew kites in the northern sky.

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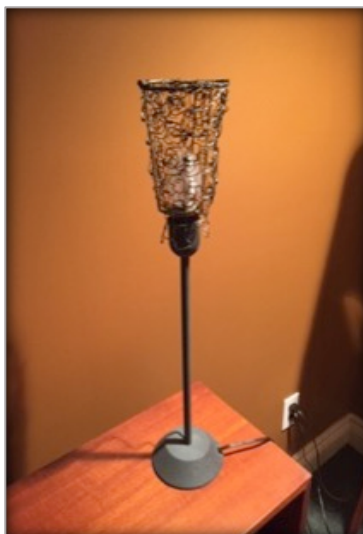
Question

Parklands, small businesses, neighbourhood gardens and heritage sites are just some of the many resources available in the local community to make the English language arts curriculum come alive for adolescent learners.

Hiking trails, a reservoir, the rocky outcrop of a hill,
places to compose a poem about the song of the whippoorwill.
How can we make stronger links to opportunities and community resources,
allowing them to play integral roles in the delivery of English courses?

To Upcycle

On a recent evening in May, in the corner of my worktable, protected by a reclaimed game board asking players to move back three spaces, I set down a gun-metal-grey lamp base with sleek lines and a decorative flourish. Just that morning, while browsing in a New England consignment shop, I found it relegated to a shelf of castaways boxed for delivery to the town dump. After wiping away the detritus of former use, I studied the base. Tall, matte, a 1970's illumination. An elegant torchiere, deserving of a shade, which I found, refitted and rewired. Walker (2010) talks about developing useful things that are capable of being continually transformed through time. Now sitting on a table in my office, the lamp reminds me of Blay. Standing on top of another pile of springy stuff under her feet, she says, "I've hit a good patch in the landfill today" (McNaughton, p. 10).



Question

Autumn leaves, rusty wire, wrapping paper and a box of miscellanea from the ReStore® can provide a wealth of inspiration for students to represent their responses to reading literary works.

Materials can express a character's fate or fall,
or describe what they look like, overall.
How can we support the use of more objects found,
to make language arts lessons more sustainably sound?

Catherine

A Slice of Bread

There is a shallow pan of leftover oatmeal on my stove. As my third year of undergraduate work comes to a close, I am too broke to imagine throwing it away. I pull an old cookbook off the shelf. Surely you must be able to do *something* with leftover oatmeal.

"I take it in my hand. It's smooth and lovely. 'What is it?' . . . Erica sighs. 'You've never seen an apple?'" (McNaughton, p. 37).

I have never made bread, but over the course of a month I apply myself to the task of upcycling leftover oatmeal into high, fluffy loaves. They fall and rise; they shift and flatten. "She turns her soft rubbery bread onto the board again. The thought of eating it makes me want to gag" (p. 37). I see myself holding the first hard loaf with pride. Compared to later-made ones, it was disgusting. In narrative collage, we know that "the interval between temporal moments can be collapsed in an instant" (Denzin, 2001, p. 29). Around me, the loaves are collapsing into time. They all exist at once while inside I am Blay and she is me; kneading the dough and wishing for the rise.



Question

We cannot be certain the ways in which books touch our students' lives, so we seek their reactions gently, respectfully and with care.

The bread in the book is the work I take home
To the kitchen table where I read alone
My world is a young one and books matter to me;
How can my teachers help me to see?

Invisible Thread

Sitting in a classroom, biting a simple sandwich from bread I have learned to perfect, Blay's voice interrupts my thoughts. The professor is quoting—"could not reproduce the acts of constructing the narratives except by drawing on the texts themselves" (Coulter & Smith, 2009, p. 578)—and I am seized by Blay's delight. By her transacted knowledge: "You mean you bake it? I thought we were going to eat it like that" (p. 40). The bread crumbles in my hands. No matter how close you look, the oatmeal is impossible to see: invisible, yet never lost.

Question

The above narrative is an exploration of intersections, connections and invisible threads—present in our lives and hard to discern; ties between our actions and our worlds.

One person's world intersects the larger world over and over
Bottles we toss away impact the growth of clover
How can our students find the invisible connection?
How can we help them change and grow their perception?

Cynthia

Abandoned Paper

While sifting through the landfill on the dim morning of a day, Blay came upon a bundle of newsprint lodged among the refuse of other people's lives. After classes have concluded for the winter term, I scoured the room for abandoned paper, rescuing newsprint, coldpress, foolscap, bristol board and more, all destined for the outside dumpster. Paper has always fascinated me, inspired me to fold, wrap, write, draw and paint. It is the afternoon of a busy day in second grade and my teacher hands me a large sheet of Manila paper. First, with crayons, and then with a wash of blue, I compose an underwater scene—apple fish, pencil fish and shipwrecked trawlers; flower fish, coral reefs and dark-eyed lobsters. While waiting for my picture to dry, I notice the clump of cedar trees standing outside our classroom door. Years later, remnants of them remain. The trees surrounding the school have grown into a small forest, hiding part of the basketball court and the parking lot at the bottom of the hill. A wall of leaves separates recess games from neighborhood houses. I open my sketchbook and remember the blossoms of the dogwood tree planted in front of the school on Arbor Day. My sheet of paper captures the moment.



Question

Before the invasion of digital devices, neighborhoods designated a specific location, such as a barn or community center, where residents brought their paper for recycling.

Cardboard, newspapers, drawings of lost dreams,
transformed into products for us to redeem.

Is a digital classroom better for our planet's care,
or does a return to paper make us more aware?

Pulp Fictions

For years now, I have been inundated with messages to go paperless and save trees. From where did this directive originate? Is that why my teachers always intercepted the secret notes that

we passed, from one student to another? In the work camp, Blay has always been told that technology is so dangerous that it must be controlled by the State. It was Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, a Bauhaus-trained artist, who, during WW II, defied concentration camp rules and smuggled in hoards of paper as a way of giving voice to the concealed worlds of the “trembling consciousness of terrified children” (Volavkova, 1993, p. xx). Office forms, scrap paper, cardboard, wrapping paper and more became blank canvases upon which the children expressed their chaotic worlds in both word and image. After working the landfills filled with old technology, would Blay have understood Pavel Friedman when, on a thin piece of paper, he wrote, “Only I never saw another butterfly” (Volavkova, p. 39)? For to understand words, Rosenblatt (2005) explains, is to see the implications “in a context significant for human beings” (p. 105).



Question

All digital devices no longer considered state-of-the art are moved into graveyards, left on basements shelves, or shipped to other parts of the world where unsuspecting recipients comb through obsolete hardware.

Keyboards, peripherals, circuit boards, too,
wedged under their feet, like an electronic zoo.
Do the discards of devices make the world less kind,
or would more paper in classrooms help to open each mind?

Catherine

Woven World

The elevator opens and the loom stands erect before me. Likewise, as I open McNaughton’s book—“The shuttle flies back and forth effortlessly” (p. 1). What is it really like to blend what has passed with what is ahead? My friend casually calls her Ergo® baby carrier a *rebozo*, a word used since 1821 for the traditional head-covering shawls of Mexican women. She slings the baby across her waist, and we walk into an Ikea®. I pick at a hole in my jeans woven by someone I will never

meet. My words weave with the coffee shop patrons and the inaudible text of our sounds tells another story than what I ever intend.



Question

We all live in a woven world of new and old, shift and stay, grow and shrink. This weaving calls for both questioning and appreciation.

Was that old shirt your brother's, your hair inherited from mom?
Was there a dress you made of Duct Tape® for the senior prom?
And if so, what made you happy, what made you feel glad?
And where were the weaving holes that left you feeling sad?

Old Soul

"The door opens and Marrella bends over the loom, letting the long gold curtain of her hair hide her face" (p. 2). I bend over the loom I have built and wish for patience. I draw in a breath from the ancient wells of knowledge I cannot claim. "The First Weaver smiles" (p. 3). At the Textile Museum of Canada, the displays of ikat-woven fabric span centuries and stories. They swirl around me in knowledge and the signs say *do not touch* and *no flash photography*. I wonder what it was like when the poncho I see was worn, when no camera was invented. "I try to picture myself as a weaver, but I can't. The future seems so blurry" (p. 197). Only honest damage injured this woven garment; the toil of the field, the sweat of the land. "The First Weaver shakes her head" (p. 4). I am left holding the difficult task of "remain[ing] wakeful to the tensions and boulders of the landscapes and stories we live within" (Caine & Steeves, 2009, p. 2).



Question

As we look at our world there is old growth under our toes. Will the classroom still use paper if the future holds iPaper?

Where are you going, what will you be;
Whose job do you want, whose future do you see?
As we ask ourselves what the days ahead might hold,
What skills and knowledge should we keep from days of old?

Cynthia

Stories Now and Then and Now

The scarecrow wears a grey raincoat and a ragged plaid scarf over a broomstick body as it guards the runners in the strawberry patch next to the wooden gate. A piece of folk art curated in a farmer's field. A prototype of past identities repurposed in clothes and found materials. In a month, the strawberries will be picked and placed in quart-sized boxes and taken in hand-made carriers to the local stand down the street. In another life, generations before, farmland became property of Stalin's state. In the mass starvation that followed, people perished by the millions, among them, a little boy, a married man, and a twelve-year-old girl saying good-bye to her father in a last letter (Snyder, 2010). When Blay questions the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of people during the technocaust, Erica informs her that the Commission has ways of instilling fear into its people. That is why, Erica explains, "They don't mind giving the Commission extra powers" (McNaughton, 2000, p. 39).



Question

Sustainable stories turn up in the pages of literary works as reminders of our too often repeated pasts located in other lifetimes.

Ancestors with passports living ten to a room
want what's best for their loved ones not later but soon.

For the new school year, when we begin to plan,
which stories will we include, and which might we ban?

The Clothing Drive

When I was in elementary school, I remember my family carefully packing, addressing and sending cardboard boxes of clothes to relatives in what was then called "The Old Country": coats and sweaters, shirts and dresses, hats and slacks. With "Return to Sender" written across the top, they arrived back on our doorstep, never having reached the intended recipients.



Question

In times of crises, including wars, famines, earthquakes and hurricanes, people come forward with donations of clothing and other essential supplies.

Some sacrifice their new gloves made from waterproof cloth, while others give worn mittens with holes made by moths.

When students embark on a drive to collect warm clothes, will they accept them all, or will they let some go?

Catherine

Old Unicorn, New City

As I sit to write, I imagine what it would be like to be a unicorn that has never taken a taxi. There are no unicorns, but there are taxis. Pulling things from shelves and boxes, I construct a diorama of what is real and unreal in this imagining. The story, like a narrative collage, is “contextually embedded and looks for particular connections between events” (Richardson, 1990, p. 13). Connections between unicorns and taxis; connections between what is on the page, in my heart and on the earth.

The unicorn moves to the city of old cereal boxes and imagined towers. Blay and Marilla camp in the fictionalized Tablelands. Each of these are fish out of water. Yet where do they find their strength amidst what is new? Again, by finding the familiar—“I can never remember food tasting so good. It warms me like happiness” (McNaughton, 2000, p. 143). Was my upcycled unicorn happy in his imagined city? “Brilliant dreams dance before me all night long. In the morning, they recede beyond the edges of my memory” (McNaughton, 2000, p. 143).

My unicorn story is lost now; he too remains on the edges of my memory, the pull to reuse and join in with the work of the earth, to let our “dreams dance” (McNaughton, 2000, p. 143).



Question

Our imagination is such a magic resource, allowing us to envision not only alternate futures, but a different past and a different present.

There were hovercrafts and rainbows and peace,
plants made of purple, cool breeze in our trees.
How can imaginary artworks and creations
help our students re-envision their many joyous nations?

Concluding Comments

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) emphasize that narrative inquiry opens both teachers and teacher educators to opportunities to reconsider themselves and the many influences that have shaped them as curriculum makers. While transacting with the characters, settings and plot lines of the *Secret Under My Skin*, we, Cynthia and Catherine, drew from our prior experiences to consider our current narratives of sustainability education for English language arts teacher education. In particular, we made use of multiple modes of meaning making, such as sculpting, felting, photography and poetic composition, as we transacted both aesthetically and efferently in our chosen recollected experiences. For example, taking a discarded lamp from reject to elegant wire-shaded torchiere provoked thoughts related to upcycling and the growing number of objects filling the land. A display featuring a poncho in a textile museum prompted the musing of a prior life, storied in the warp and weft of the one who wore it.

Leggo (1991) advocated the generation of questions as integral paths into the reading of any literary work. While inquiring into our narratives in relation to our chosen book, we came to pose questions for further reflection and action. Keeping in mind the previously-mentioned definition of sustainability put forth by Medrick (2013), we came to address such factors as community connection, in-school and out-of-school learning, personal awareness, and the conservation of human and natural worlds. According to Chin and Osborne (2008), questioning motivates individuals to think about ideas presented in relation to other things that they know. As we return to teaching in our methods classrooms, our narratives will provide us with rich working material and multimodal practices to encourage teachers to inquire into their own experiences and knowledge in relation to teaching sustainability in English language arts. In turn, extending the same opportunity to the teachers in our methods classes will provide them with a solid starting point from which to begin, or continue, their venture into addressing sustainability education in their own classrooms. Providing ourselves with numerous opportunities for engaging in both aesthetic and efferent stances via multiple means of expression, such as narrative museums, body biographies and journaling, would encourage greater engagement in the process of narrative inquiry (Leggo, 2008; Morawski & Rottmann, 2016; Rosenblatt, 1986). In addition to providing such activities in the English language arts classroom, collaborating on special projects with other subject teachers, local groups and businesses would provide numerous opportunities for teachers to "deepen the understanding of the sustainability challenges facing society, to strengthen critical thinking abilities . . . and to inspire them to take action in their own lives and communities" (Clark & Button, 2011).

In our transactions with Blay, Erica, Marilla and other characters caught in the plot lines of future and past settings, we move into our present lives as teacher educators from scarecrow to scarcity, leftovers to loaves, landfill to light and landscape to loom. When Blay confides that she only knows what she has been told, Erica asks, "Yes, but, Blay, what if the Commission knew the earth was healing itself, but decided not to tell anyone?" (McNaughton, 2000, p. 64).

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